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About Individual Education Programs (IEPs)

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About Individual Education Programs (IEPs)

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Children can get an Individual Education Program (IEP) if they qualify under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, a federal law that promises a “free and appropriate education” to children diagnosed with:

- Autism
- Hearing or visual impairment
- Developmental delay
- Emotional disturbance (includes many mental health disorders)
- Intellectual disability
- Orthopedic impairment
- Other impairing health condition
- Specific learning disorder
- Communication disorder

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- You
- Your child's teacher
- A special education teacher
- Someone representing the school district who is familiar with the curriculum and will be able to provide or supervise the IEP
- A school psychologist or someone who can explain the results of your child's evaluation
- Your child (if appropriate)

You can also bring an advocate with you to the meeting. For example, that person could be someone to help you take notes, a private learning specialist or a special education attorney.

During the meeting the IEP team should write a statement about your child's current academic performance and social, behavioral and motor skills. This is called your child's "Present Level of Performance" (PLOP) and it should be based on data as well as observations from you and other members of the IEP team. The PLOP will serve as a baseline to monitor your child's progress.

Next, the IEP team members will set goals for what your child should accomplish in the next year. These goals should be clearly stated and specific to your child. In order to achieve those goals, the team will determine which special education services or accommodations will be provided to your child. An IEP might include specially trained educators, special teaching methods, accommodations like extra testing time, and whatever else is considered appropriate. This is an opportunity for you to ask lots of questions and share your own experience about what has and hasn't helped your child in the past and what you think would be helpful now.

The IEP team will then draft the plan. In most schools parents only need to sign off on their child's very first IEP. If you aren't ready to sign the plan the school has drafted, or

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are entitled to. If you think your child isn't receiving their services, or their grades are slipping or you are noticing other problems, bring it up with the IEP team.

Your child's IEP should be reviewed and updated every year. Talk to members of the IEP team early in the school year to set up the IEP planning meeting for a new year.

Learn more about IEPs, including how to handle IEP issues with the school, at Understood.org.

For any legal questions, you may want to consult the Parent Training and Information Center in your state.

Return to Connect to Care for more information about getting kids help.

Frequently Asked Questions

What disorders qualify a child for an Individual Education Program (IEP)?

What happens at an IEP meeting?

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Hannah Sheldon-Dean, MSW, is the former managing editor at the Child Mind Institute. She holds a BA from Brown University ... Read Bio

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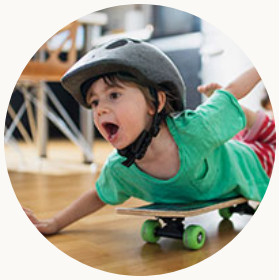

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